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The Book of Job: A Philosopho-Anthropological Search in a German Intellectual Novel

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Abstract

The paper deals with the analysis of the novel “Berlin – Alexanderplatz” by Alfred Döblin on the basis of philosopho-anthropological conceptions. The study demonstrates the importance of anthropological inquiry in the disquieting search for the human identity. The authors’ approach allows for deeper understanding of culture as the human ability of feeling sense, attaching importance to every individual human’s life at every historical moment.

The view of culture as a transcendental reality of absolute values, global universals is preserved in the German intellectual novel. The novel is defined by a deep existential anthropological search, but at once it reveals the understanding of Culture as the human ability of feeling sense, of attaching importance to every individual human’s life, to every historical moment.

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1. Introduction

The German intellectual world, represented by its greatest sophists, during all the epochs of its existence, concentrated on the Eternal and, therefore, on the always opportune “main philosophical question” of “the spirit and culture science” – “*What is culture*”. The basis here was and is the conceptual context of the *human being*: Culture is a means of human existence in the world; initially Culture = Humanness.

For German classical philosophy with its philosopho-methodological centre – Kant’s transcendental idealism – it was natural to determine culture as a world of Human Spirit nobility, its self-fulfillment in the historic process. The whole of Kant’s philosophical theory, based on rationality, reasonableness, strict consistency, aspiring to an integral

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and holistic worldview, is steeped in the inquiry about humanness. As it is known, Kant declared the question of “*What is human*” to be the most important, in fact by this he made an anthropological turn in the world of philosophical thought, orienting philosophy to an anthropological search. Kant’s transcendental philosophy in general is a philosophy of the revelation of the *pure essences*: pure intelligence, pure moral, pure beauty, and pure humanity (Kant, 1996, p. 66). In Kant’s theory humanness is thought of in terms of tribute, in the aspect of the definition of objectives, he stands as the highest and the last goal for himself. Due to his purely humanistic nature, human aspires to the ideal. “Only that, which has the aim of its existence in itself, which is the human, whose mind is able to determine his goals for himself... only the human then, can be the ideal of beauty, as well as the humanity in the capacity of intellectual being, can be the only ideal of the perfection among all things in the world” – is clearly stated in the “Critics of the judgment ability”. Thus, Culture in the aspect of the classical philosophical program was conceived not merely as the way of human existence but truly as the way of *purely humanistic* existence, a concentration of the humanness in human as a transcendental reality of the generally valid ideals, norms, laws, standards, canons, the highest values; culture was based on irrefragable principles of the integral and holistic Mind.

2. Culture as a means of human existence in German classical philosophy

2.1. The main ideas of philosopho-anthropological conceptions

The strategy of the German classics was always fundamentally significant in the respect of determination of the *humanistic* as it was clarification of what the *purely humanistic* was. However, the tragic historical events of the first part of the XX century asserted a great influence over the specificity of philosophical thought and gave the pulse to the appearance of the existential philosopho-anthropological conceptions. The Human was seen not only as the conscious, intellectual essence, but also opened up in his impermanence, historicity, occasionality, borderline states; the feeling of mortality, fear, and despair became strained. Human existence in the world as a co-existence with others; asking about the sense and comprehending this existence became very important for the sophists of the antipro-existential school. As K. Jasper (1994) pointed out: “*The sense of entering the world* becomes the content of the philosophism. Philosophy is not a means... It is a consciousness in realization. Philosophism is cogitation, by means of which... I am active in the capacity of myself. This is connoted not as an objective significance of knowledge, but a consciousness of the existence in the world (Jasper, 1994, p.401). For the determination of the human existence in the world, M. Heidegger (1991) brings in the concept Dasein, which contains the whole conceptual completeness of *the humanistic* in the variety of human expressions, states, and feelings: love, hate, blame, anxiety, will, fear and others. In the works of M. Heidegger and K. Jasper, Kant’s anthropological inquiry was transformed into an inquiry about an inquiring human himself, whose existence peculiarly lays – Dasein – *in care*, or in other words in the comprehending attitude towards his existence, in the disquieting search of his own human identity, in realization of the necessity of the continuous self-creation and participation in the World creation.

2.2. The reflection of philosopho-anthropological conceptions in the German intellectual novel

This philosopho- anthropological turn from Kant’s transcendental ideal of beauty and perfection as a pure human essence to Dasein was fixed in the German intellectual novel. In its imaginative space the counters of another – existential – anthropology were outlined and this demanded of artists a fundamentally new way of cogitation, aimed at a “delivering” (in Heidegger’s interpretation) of the sense of the human entering the World, an initial feeling of anxiety, care, loneliness, despair, suffering, which are natural for humans in the deep origin of humanism (Kafka, 1991; Mursile, 1994; Feuchtwanger, 1988). A man with a desperate inquiry about the sense of human existence – R. Mursile’s man without qualities, H. Hesse’s wolf-man, F. Kafka’s man of nonsense – entered the German intellectual world.

In respect of the designated problem, the novel “Berlin – Alexanderplatz” by Alfred Döblin, sparks a special research interest (Döblin, 1961). In comparison with the works of F. Kafka, H. Hesse, T. Mann, L. Feuchtwanger, H. Broch and other creators of the German intellectual novels, Döblin’s works are poorly studied. However, this author’s works are quite multifaceted, and significant, because the epochal philosophical search is depicted there,

and various discoveries of the philosophers of the existential anthropological school (E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, K. Jasper, H. Hadamer). Döblin was certainly familiar with the anthropo-philosophical situation, felt by each great sophist of the first part of the XX century; this was the creative situation of his personal anthropological search and turning point. German classical philosophy was carefully studied by the author, both the transcendental kernel (nucleus) (I. Kant, H. Hegel, F. Schelling, L. Feuerbach) and the philosophy of life (I. Goethe, A. Schopenhauer, F. Nietzsche, O. Spengler); philosophical ideas were organically put in the narration of all his great works. In the philosophical composition “Unser Dasein” / “Our existence”, at the centre of which stands *human's cogitative, feeling, suffering “I”*, Döblin in fact had already set the Dasein concept – *a human presence, existence in the world*, which were later explained by M. Heidegger and which became the key concepts in the philosophy of the XX century, and which, in general, anticipated Heidegger's ideas.

2.2.1. *The choice of “fair life” for the main character of the novel “Berlin – Alexanderplatz”*

The novel “Berlin – Alexanderplatz” was finished in 1929 and at once brought Döblin great fame in Germany, evoking a lot of discussions; the historical situation of the world presaging global catastrophe and the inevitable war is reflected in it; the tragedy of man's alienation in the situation of the political instability is externalized in it. Its character – Franz Biberkopf – is a man who entered into an atmosphere of uncertainty, dipped into the state of a weird absence of mind, lack of confidence and incompleteness. Franz has just been released from the prison where he had spent four years for the excusable homicide of his lover. He had always been out of tune with the law before, but now this person “wants to become fair and respectable at all costs”, however he is not accustomed with independent cogitation, and does not have a clear idea of what “fair” should be like.

“He stood before the door of the Tegel prison, and he was free. Yesterday he was still digging potatoes there, beyond, on the field together with others wearing a prisoner's clothes, and now he was in a summer yellow coat; they were digging potatoes there, beyond, and he was free. He was missing tram after tram, leaning against a red fence, and was not leaving. The guard who was standing near the gate passed him several times... but he did not make a step from the place he was standing. A scary minute passed (scary, Franz? Why scary?), four years were over. The black metal gates, which he had been staring at for one year with growing wrath (wrath? Why wrath?) were shut behind his back. He was out. There were others, sitting inside, chopping, lacquering something, sorting, gluing... Some have still got two years, some – five. He stood at the bus stop. The punishment has begun.”

This is loneliness and perplexity, the everyday state of a man who was dropped into the world, where the borders between reality and unreality, between truth and false are unstable, flexible and uncertain. Franz sells newspapers on the corner of the Alexanderplatz street, drinks beer, eats sausages, acquired a “pretty chubby girl”, but he still can not manage to live a “fair” life. *“And as long as he had money he remained fair, but then he ran out of money as well.”* The city of Berlin involves Franz Biberkopf in its chaotic movement more and more insistently and upsets each try of our character to be fair, kind and trustful to people, obstinately seducing him into crime. Step by step Franz gets in touch with a gang of thieves and gets closer to its leader, the cynic and murderer Reingold; then he finds himself involved through deception in a robbery. The collapse of his soul is the price for this and he gets into a mental health clinic. The last blow – the murder of Franz's beloved Mizzi, committed by his “fatal” friend Reingold so that Franz turned out to be at fault – brings Franz to death's edge.

“Franz has wrested a newspaper from the fatty's hands. “There are two photos near each other, that, that the horrible, disgusting fear, this is me – me after all, why is it because of the event on the Shtralazerstrasse, why, disgusting fear, this is me after all and Reingold, the signature: the murder, the murder of prostitute in Freienwald, Emily Parzunke from Bernau. Mizzi! What, is it me after all?”

2.2.2. *The reflection of human desolation through the novel text structure*

Döblin fully realized the text strategies of German intellectual novel creators: a deep philosophism, shown in the author's philosophical digressions, character's philosophical dialogs, use of the ideas of the antinomy method, multilevel text, the principle of implicit citation, religious and mythological origins, ancient mythologemes and archetypal cogitation, “the conscious stream”. F. Kafka and R. Mursile are especially close to him in terms of style

and narrative manner. Precisely this kind of novel text structure – fragmentarity, randomness, disconnectedness, incompleteness – reflects the loss of entirety in the world, human desolation, disorder, life instability, meaninglessness and nonsense of reality, which it is so hard to *be* in. After Mizzi's death, her past is suddenly opened to the reader: *"The case in which Mizzi was lying was opened. She was the daughter of a tram conductor in Bernau, her mother left her husband and ran away, and nobody knew why. Mizzi remained alone... Sometimes, in the evenings, she went to Berlin to Lesterman's dances..."* "Everything is good in its season, - Döblin modifies the words of the Bible's Ecclesiastes, - *sew up and tear, keep and leave. I glorified those dead people who lay under the trees having a sleep of death.*" This contiguity of texts lets him express the intimate thought about initial human historicity: fragility, temporality, transience and – because of all these things – the even greater value and importance of human life.

2.2.3. *References to the religious texts in the novel*

The existential anthropological situation, discussed above, was discovered by the author in the origin of human existence itself. The novel "Berlin-Alexanderplatz" is pierced with religion, references to the religious texts has are deeply circumspect, and they all relate to the very intimate essence of Döblin's works. In his philosophical imaginative world there is The Book of Ecclesiastes – The Book of Job, and many apocalyptic images and religious motives are added in his book. The necessity of expressing the deeply humanistic, expressing the depth of the human's life, leads, in fact, to the depth of the text, where under the cover of the imaginative cloak, there is a parable of The Old Testament hidden – a story about the trials of a Biblical martyr Job, sick and exhausted, left by everybody, praying to God for a cure. In the Chapter "Talk with Job" – "It is all up to you, Job, but you do not want" – we can see Franz Biberkopf getting closer to the image of Job, Job's fate is interpreted as the prediction of Franz's fate. In his work Döblin restores the *Job situation* as an archetype of human fate in general: Job's mythologeme is an image of a man – a never-before-seen martyr, for whom the design of God is initially incomprehensible, and the justice of the Father is higher than the conceivability of the Son, a man doomed to a perpetual inquiring about the sense of life, death, history, fate, suffer. What is the sense of this ancient, supertemporal Job situation? The Book of Job tells us about the innocently suffering righteous, who, in proportion to human justice, do not deserve all the misfortunes which came to them. Job, who always felt reverence for God, and was absolutely sinless, lost all his property, children and then was stricken by a severe disease. This parable of The Old Testament expresses its idea of the nonsense of human existence, when a man loses the sense of what is happening to him in this world, created in the design of God, and calls to God, striving to discover this sense. That is not only the question of Job experiencing his destiny, but it is the question of the whole situation when God leaves, the situation of human loneliness, hesitations about God's justice and the reasonableness of the world *order* in general, despair, caused by the realization that the world is naturally nonsensical, *disorderly* and incomprehensible. So, is God fair or unfair, is the world nonsensical or instinctive with sense? A man does not know why he is to blame, why he is inevitably sentenced to death by God, and why is he doomed to ask questions forever.

2.2.4 *The idea of human identity in the world discussed in the novel*

Is it possible to overcome the Job situation? Can the existential situation of Franz Biberkopf be solved according to Döblin? Everything became clear when Job/Franz hears the voice of God when talking to God, sense is discovered, and the restoration of world order seems possible. *"You wish you were not weak, you wish you resisted, or it is better to be pierced through, so that there were neither thoughts nor mind left, in order to become a cattle entirely!"* According to Döblin, exhausted, pathetic, sick Job suffers because he was broken internally; there is no wish, will power or freedom of thought inside him, because he stopped being himself – he stopped *being*. Such a state is not a *humanistic one*; it is not common to a human. It is not a humanistic way of existence. One can not incessantly cry, complain and ask for help from on high, one should comprehend everything he went through, purify himself through suffering and start to live life from the very beginning. The initial reason of the Job situation lies in the worshipping of God as an authority and the self-sufficiency of Truth: righteous Job is aware of the existence and sovereignty of God, of the absolute reasonableness of the world he created, he is afraid of breaking the *law* of God. And Job's fear of God was compensated with his earthly wealth: he possesses numerous herds, he is happy with his

descendants and healthy, and in other words he feels the correctness of the *world order*. But this world order does not give the opportunity to think about its basis, reasons, laws, and does not evoke the necessity of live dialog with God, of the aspiration to *comprehend* God. Only when the world order is broken and the Job's/Franz's "*fair life*" does not justify itself, the question "*why*" appears and the search of *sense* begins. In the end of the novel there are important truths opened to Franz Biberkopf: he comprehends that "a ship will not stand in the face of a storm without an anchor, a man will not stand on his feet without other people", he learned how to hear others, since what others say concerns "you" and... "*You should keep your eyes skinned, always keep your eyes skinned, there is always something which is being prepared in the world... When a war begins and one is called for a draft, and he does not know what this war is for, he is to blame after all, and it serves him right. You should keep your eyes skinned, and you should not be alone.*"

Philosophical commentary on Franz Biberkopf's boundary Job situation described in Döblin's novel can be found in K. Jasper's work: "Everything that is then realized in the world begins in human identity. As if when in soulless existence the world becomes hopeless, something which has just returned to pure possibility is preserved in the human... When one loses his world in crisis, he has to create a new one again, from its origin, on the basis of the prerequisites he has... A human is the only creature in the world, to which, in his present existence, reality is opened. That is why he crosses the limits of his present existence and the world, reaching its basis, striving to where he becomes sure of his origins, as if he participates in creation. He is not protected in his origins and he does not reach the goal. He is looking for the Eternal in his life between the origins and the aim".

3. Conclusion

Thus, in Döblin's novel "Berlin – Alexanderplatz" the archetypical Job situation is restored. This situation is in fact Heidegger's *Dasein* in its origin and reflects the following prime features: 1) the initial purpose of the *human existence in the world* is comprehending existence, 2) co-existence with others, 3) filling life with meaning, and creation of the universum of reasons for being. The authors' original approach based on philosopho-anthropological conceptions allows for identifying this novel as a model of deep existential anthropological search in the German philosophical novel, which appeared earlier than that of Heidegger's. It is noted for Human's immersion in the World and the global historical process. In its imaginative space, the philosopho-historical process of the German intellectual world's Culture research is fully reflected. The view of Culture as a transcendental reality of absolute values, global universals, ideals, norms, which is typical the German classical philosophy, is, indeed, preserved. But, this novel attaches importance to every individual human's life in every historical moment.

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